

Minutes of the meeting of Great Notley Country Park Joint Venture Partnership Board held at Great Notley Country Park, Braintree at 1.00pm on Monday 3 April 2023

Present:

Councillors:

W Schmitt (Chairman)	Braintree District Council
G Butland	Essex County Council
M Durham	Essex County Council
F Ricci	Braintree District Council

The following officers and advisors were also present in support:

Samir Pandya	Operations Strategy and Policy Manager, Braintree District Council (BDC)
Paul Partridge	Head of Operations, BDC
Mark Rowley	Commercial Operations Manager, Essex County Council (ECC)
Lisa Smart	Country Parks Manager, ECC
Judith Dignum	Democratic Services Officer, ECC

1. Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

The Board received the report on Membership, Apologies and Declarations and it was noted that:

1. The membership of the Board was as shown in the report.
2. Apologies had been received from Cherie Root, Corporate Director, Braintree District Council.
3. Councillors G Butland and F Ricci declared an interest in agenda item 4 (ECC Operations Update) in that they are members of Great Notley Parish Council and the ward they each represent on Braintree District Council (Great Notley and Black Notley) includes the location of Great Notley Country Park. Minute 6 below refers.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of Great Notley Country Park Joint Venture Partnership Board held on 1 September 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Updates on matters arising from the minutes were provided during presentation of the remaining items on the agenda.

3. Artificial Grass Pitch and Multi-Use Games Area (GNCP/01/23)

The Board received an update on usage and income from the Artificial Grass Pitch (AGP) and Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) at Great Notley Country Park for the period 1 April 2022 – 17 March 2023.

The following issues were noted during the update:

- Numbers of bookings for the AGP and MUGA had now returned to pre-Covid levels. The biggest user was Great Notley Youth Football Club, with whom Braintree District Council had a Service Level Agreement. Income generation was on target and was expected to remain in line with the budget projection for 2022/23.
- Investigations concerning the potential for a site near the football pitches to become allotments for the parish of Great Notley had revealed the site to be contaminated. The cost of remedial work proving prohibitive, the site had been abandoned in favour of another piece of land outside the park which was now itself under investigation as to suitability.

The report and update were noted.

4. ECC Operations Update – Great Notley Country Park (GNCP/02/23)

Councillors Butland and Ricci declared an interest in this item - minute 1 above refers.

The Board received an update on activity at the Country Park, including staffing, maintenance, events, the Flitch Way and work with volunteers. The following issues arose from consideration:

- Staffing-related challenges were ongoing, but with some improvement following the appointment of two Park Operations Assistants. Thanks were expressed to Samir Pandya and his team at Braintree District Council for their help and support and also to the clubs, organisations and other users of the park's facilities for their help and understanding.
- An apprenticeship scheme with Abberton Rural Training was proving successful as a gateway into work in the sector for participants, 90% of whom were living with special educational needs and/or disabilities. A graduate of the scheme had recently been appointed to a seasonal role at Essex Outdoors.
- Proposals from third parties to host events in the park were assessed according to their cohesion with the park's ethos and environment.

- Members were advised that attempts to progress the establishment of an angling club at the park (as supported at the last meeting) had proved unsuccessful. However, the recent engagement of a bailiff from the Angling Trust was having a positive impact on management of the lake area and it may now be possible to consider introducing a day permit scheme. Members welcomed this development and expressed the hope that the park may now begin to attract serious anglers, especially given that several other managed angling facilities in the district had closed.
- In response to a question, it was reported that recent resurfacing work across the park was thought to have included the area around the entrance near the Pegasus crossing. Members were advised to contact the Country Parks Manager if previously reported issues remained unresolved.
- Emphasising the responsibility of councils to demonstrate best practice in relation to tree maintenance, the Chairman expressed the view that routine tree work should not be carried out between the months of March and September, with that period restricted to emergency safety work only.
- There was a discussion around the ongoing challenges caused by flooding in the park and the lack of resources available to tackle this high-priority issue. The matter had been suggested to Braintree District Council as a potential beneficiary of Section 106 funding (a financial contribution sought from developers towards the cost of providing community and social infrastructure).

The report and update were noted.

5. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Board would be arranged as required, with availability to be canvassed by the Democratic Services Officer.

6. Urgent Business

The Chairman agreed to consideration of the following item of urgent business on the grounds that there was a need to update the Board on a decision taken by Essex County Council since the publication of the agenda for the meeting.

Countryside Stewardship Agreement

The Commercial Operations Manager updated the Board on a decision taken by Essex County Council on 27 March to enter five of its country parks, including Great Notley, into a 15-year Countryside Stewardship Agreement with the Rural Payments Agency. Under the terms of the Agreement, the County Council would receive funding of £447,659 in return for

implementation of an environmental management regime at each of the parks, with the aim of delivering target environmental outcomes.

Members of the Board expressed their pleasure and support for the Agreement, and extended thanks to everyone involved in the preparatory work.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 2.10pm.

Chairman